

WHO calls Ebola vaccine being tested in Guinea 'highly effective' as trials continue

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The World Health Organization last week said that trials of a vaccine developed by Merck, Sharp & Dohme has been "highly effective" against the deadly virus Ebola.

An independent body of international experts called the Data and Safety Monitoring Board conducted the review of VSV-EBOV and preliminary results of the interim data were published July 31 in the British journal *The Lancet*.

"This is an extremely promising development," WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan said in a [press release](#). "The credit goes to the Guinean government, the people living in the communities and our partners in this project. An effective vaccine will be another very important tool for both current and future Ebola outbreaks."

The disease, which can be fatal to humans, is spread through direct contact with bodily fluids of a sick person or exposure to contaminated needles and other objects. People are only contagious after they develop symptoms. They may suffer a headache, joint and muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea, fever and other symptoms.

The virus can stay in the body for up to 21 days before making an infected person sick, although symptoms typically take up to 10 days to appear.

As of Aug. 2, WHO [said](#) there have been 27,862 reported confirmed, probable and suspected cases of Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone with 11,281 reported deaths.

However, the number of new cases is slowing. There were only two confirmed cases of Ebola reported last week in Guinea and Sierra Leone, the lowest weekly total to have been reported since March 2014. Liberia was declared free of Ebola transmission in early May, but new cases emerged in June.

Worldwide, there have been another 36 reported confirmed, probable and suspected cases – mostly in Nigeria, but also in Mali, Italy, Senegal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States – with 15 deaths. The U.S. had four reported cases with one death.

One of several vaccines being tested, VSV-EBOV was actually developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada and licensed to NewLink Genetics, which then entered into an exclusive agreement with Merck. They've gotten financial support from the Canadian and U.S. governments, among others.

While the vaccine shows 100 percent efficacy in individuals, according to WHO, more "conclusive evidence is needed on its capacity to protect populations through what's known as 'herd immunity.'" The Guinean government approved that it would continue with this trial that began March 23.

WHO explained in the press release that the "ring" vaccination method was adopted for the trial. By vaccinating all individuals who've come in contact with an infected person, it creates a "protective ring," preventing the spread of the virus, said John-Arne Røttingen, director of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health's infectious disease control division.

To date, more than 4,000 contacts, including family members, neighbors and co-workers, of nearly 100 Ebola patients have voluntarily participated in the trial. Additionally, frontline workers are also participating in the vaccine trial.

For more:

- [read](#) the WHO press release about the vaccine